Pantheism

Pantheism is the belief that reality is identical with divinity,[1] or that all-things compose an all-encompassing, immanent god.[2] Pantheist belief does not recognize a distinct personal anthropomorphic god[3] and instead characterizes a broad range of doctrines differing in forms of relationships between reality and divinity.[4] Pantheistic concepts date back thousands of years, and pantheistic elements have been identified in various religious traditions. The term "pantheism" was coined by mathematician Joseph Raphson in 1697[5][6] and has since been used to describe the beliefs of a variety of people and organizations.

Pantheism was popularized in Western culture as a theology and philosophy based on the work of the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, particularly his book *Ethics*.[7] A pantheistic stance was also taken in the 16th century by philosopher and cosmologist Giordano Bruno.[8]

Contents

Etymology

Definitions

History
- Pre-modern times
- Baruch Spinoza
- 18th century
  - Pantheism controversy
- 19th century
  - Growing influence
  - Comparison with non-Christian religions
- 20th century
- 21st century

Categorizations
- Degree of determinism
- Degree of belief
- Form of monism
- Other

Related concepts

Pantheism in religion
- Traditional religions
- Spirituality and new religious movements

See also

Notes

References

Sources

Further reading

External links

Etymology

Pantheism derives from the Greek πᾶν *pan* (meaning "all, of everything") and θεός *theos* (meaning "god, divine"). The first known combination of these roots appears in Latin, in Joseph Raphson's 1697 book *De Spatio Reali seu Ente Infinito*,[6] where he refers to the "pantheismus" of Spinoza and others.[5] It was subsequently translated into English as "pantheism" in 1702.

Definitions

There are a variety of definitions of pantheism. Some consider it a theological and philosophical position concerning God.[9]:p.8

Pantheism is the view that everything is part of an all-encompassing, immanent God.[10] All forms of reality may then be considered either modes of that Being, or identical with it.[11] Some hold that pantheism is a non-religious philosophical position. To them, pantheism is the view that the Universe (in the sense of the totality of all existence) and God are identical (implying a denial of the personality and transcendence of God).[12]

History

Pre-modern times

Early traces of pantheist thought can be found within the theology of the ancient Greek religion of Orphism, where *pan* (the all) is made cognate with the creator God Phanes (symbolizing the universe),[13] and with Zeus, after the swallowing of Phanes.[14]

Pantheistic tendencies existed in a number of early Gnostic groups, with pantheistic thought appearing throughout the Middle Ages.[15] These included a section of Johannes Scotus Eriugena's 9th-century work De divisione naturae and the beliefs of mystics such as Amalric of Bena (11th–12th centuries) and Eckhart (12th–13th).[15]:pp. 620–621

The Roman Catholic Church has long regarded pantheistic ideas as heresy.[16][17] Giordano Bruno, an Italian monk who evangelized about an immanent and infinite God, was burned at the stake in 1600 by the Roman Inquisition. He has since become known as a celebrated pantheist and martyr of science,[18] and an influence on many later thinkers.

Baruch Spinoza

In the West, pantheism was formalized as a separate theology and philosophy based on the work of the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza.[9]:p.7 Spinoza was a Dutch philosopher of Portuguese descent raised in the Sephardi Jewish community in Amsterdam.[20] He developed highly controversial ideas regarding the authenticity of the Hebrew Bible and the nature of the Divine, and was effectively excluded from Jewish society at age 23, when the local synagogue issued a *herem* against him.[21] A number of his books were published posthumously, and shortly thereafter included in the Catholic Church's *Index of Forbidden Books*. The breadth and importance of Spinoza's work would not be realized for many years - as the groundwork for the 18th-century Enlightenment[22] and modern biblical criticism,[23] including modern conceptions of the self and the universe.[24]

The philosophy of Baruch Spinoza is often regarded as pantheism.[9][19]

In the posthumous *Ethics*, "Spinoza wrote the last indisputable Latin masterpiece, and one in which the refined conceptions of medieval philosophy are finally turned against themselves and destroyed entirely.".[25] In particular, he opposed René Descartes' famous mind–body dualism, the theory that the body and spirit are separate.[26] Spinoza held the monist view that the two are the same, and monism is a fundamental part of his philosophy. He was described as a "God-intoxicated man," and used the word God to describe the unity of all substance.[26] This view influenced philosophers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who said, "You are either a Spinozist or not a philosopher at all."[27] Spinoza earned praise as one of the great rationalists of 17th-century philosophy[28] and one of Western philosophy's most important thinkers.[29] Although the term "pantheism" was not coined until after his death, he is regarded as the most celebrated advocate of the concept.[30] *Ethics* was the major source from which Western pantheism spread.[7]

Heinrich Heine, in his *Concerning the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (1833–36), remarked that "I don't remember now where I read that Herder once exploded peevishly at the constant preoccupation with Spinoza, "If Goethe would only for once pick up some other Latin book than Spinoza!" But this applies not only to Goethe; quite a number of his friends, who later became more or less well-known as poets, paid homage to pantheism in their youth, and this doctrine flourished actively in German art before it attained supremacy among us as a philosophic theory."

In their *The Holy Family* (1844) Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels notes, "Spinozism dominated the eighteenth century both in its later French variety, which made matter into substance, and in deism, which conferred on matter a more spiritual name.... Spinoza's French school and the supporters of deism were but two sects disputing over the true meaning of his system...."

In George Henry Lewes's words (1846), "Pantheism is as old as philosophy. It was taught in the old Greek schools — by Plato, by St. Augustine, and by the Jews. Indeed, one may say that Pantheism, under one of its various shapes, is the necessary consequence of all metaphysical inquiry, when pushed to its logical limits; and from this reason do we find it in every age and nation. The dreamy contemplative Indian, the quick versatile Greek, the practical Roman, the quibbling Scholastic, the ardent Italian, the lively Frenchman, and the bold Englishman, have all pronounced it as the final truth of philosophy. Wherein consists Spinoza's originality? — what is his merit? — are natural questions, when we see him only lead to the same result as others had before proclaimed. His merit and originality consist in the systematic exposition and development of that doctrine — in his hands, for the first time, it assumes the aspect of a science. The Greek and Indian Pantheism is a vague fanciful doctrine, carrying with it no scientific conviction; it may be true — it looks true — but the proof is wanting. But with Spinoza there is no choice: if you understand his terms, admit the possibility of his science, and seize his meaning; you can no more doubt his conclusions than you can doubt Euclid; no mere opinion is possible, conviction only is possible."[31]

S. M. Melamed (1933) noted, "It may be observed, however, that Spinoza was not the first prominent monist and pantheist in modern Europe. A generation before him Bruno conveyed a similar message to humanity. Yet Bruno is merely a beautiful episode in the history of the human mind, while Spinoza is one of its most potent forces. Bruno was a rhapsodist and a poet, who was overwhelmed with artistic emotions; Spinoza, however, was spiritus purus and in his method the prototype of the philosopher."[32]

18th century

The first known use of the term "pantheism" was in Latin ("pantheismus" [5]) by the English mathematician Joseph Raphson in his work *De Spatio Reali seu Ente Infinito*, published in 1697.[6] Raphson begins with a distinction between atheistic "panhylists" (from the Greek roots *pan*, "all", and *hyle*, "matter"), who believe everything is matter, and Spinozan "pantheists" who believe in "a certain universal substance, material as well as intelligence, that fashions all things that exist out of its own essence."[33][34] Raphson thought that the universe was immeasurable in respect to a human's capacity of understanding, and believed that humans would never be able to comprehend it.[35] He referred to the pantheism of the Ancient Egyptians, Persians, Syrians, Assyrians, Greek, Indians, and Jewish Kabbalists, specifically referring to Spinoza.[36]

The term was first used in English by a translation of Raphson's work in 1702. It was later used and popularized by Irish writer John Toland in his work of 1705 *Socinianism Truly Stated, by a pantheist*.[37][15]:pp. 617–618 Toland was influenced by both Spinoza and Bruno, and had read Joseph Raphson's *De Spatio Reali*, referring to it as "the ingenious Mr. Ralphson's (sic) Book of Real Space".[38] Like Raphson, he used the terms "pantheist" and "Spinozist" interchangeably.[39] In 1720 he wrote the *Pantheisticon: or The Form of Celebrating the Socratic-Society* in Latin, envisioning a pantheist society that believed, "All things in the world are one, and one is all in all things ... what is all in all things is God, eternal and immense, neither born nor ever to perish."[40][41] He clarified his idea of pantheism in a letter to Gottfried Leibniz in 1710 when he referred to "the pantheistic opinion of those who believe in no other eternal being but the universe".[15][42][43][44]

In the mid-eighteenth century, the English theologian Daniel Waterland defined pantheism this way: "It supposes God and nature, or God and the whole universe, to be one and the same substance—one universal being; insomuch that men's souls are only modifications of the divine substance."[15][45] In the early nineteenth century, the German theologian Julius Wegscheider defined pantheism as the belief that God and the world established by God are one and the same.[15][46]

Pantheism controversy

Between 1785–89, a major controversy about Spinoza's philosophy arose between the German philosophers Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (a critic) and Moses Mendelssohn (a defender). Known in German as the *Pantheismusstreit* (pantheism controversy), it helped spread pantheism to many German thinkers.[47] A 1780 conversation with the German dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing led Jacobi to a protracted study of Spinoza's works. Lessing stated that he knew no other philosophy than Spinozism. Jacobi's *Über die Lehre des Spinozas* (1st ed. 1785, 2nd ed. 1789) expressed his strenuous objection to a dogmatic system in philosophy, and drew upon him the enmity of the Berlin group, led by Mendelssohn. Jacobi claimed that Spinoza's doctrine was pure materialism, because all Nature and God are said to be nothing but extended substance. This, for Jacobi, was the result of Enlightenment rationalism and it would finally end in absolute atheism. Mendelssohn disagreed with Jacobi, saying that pantheism shares more characteristics of theism than of atheism. The entire issue became a major intellectual and religious concern for European civilization at the time.[48]

Willi Goetschel argues that Jacobi's publication significantly shaped Spinoza's wide reception for centuries following its publication, obscuring the nuance of Spinoza's philosophic work.[49]

19th century

Growing influence

During the beginning of the 19th century, pantheism was the viewpoint of many leading writers and philosophers, attracting figures such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge in Britain; Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Schelling and Hegel in Germany; Knut Hamsun in Norway; and Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau in the United States. Seen as a growing threat by the Vatican, in 1864 it was formally condemned by Pope Pius IX in the *Syllabus of Errors*.[50]

A letter written by William Herndon, Abraham Lincoln's law partner in 1886, was sold at auction for US$30,000 in 2011.[51] In it, Herndon writes of the U.S. President's evolving religious views, which included pantheism.

> "Mr. Lincoln's religion is too well known to me to allow of even a shadow of a doubt; he is or was a Theist and a Rationalist, denying all extraordinary – supernatural inspiration or revelation. At one time in his life, to say the least, he was an elevated Pantheist, doubting the immortality of the soul as the Christian world understands that term. He believed that the soul lost its identity and was immortal as a force. Subsequent to this he rose to the belief of a God, and this is all the change he ever underwent."[51][52]

The subject is understandably controversial, but the content of the letter is consistent with Lincoln's fairly lukewarm approach to organized religion.[52]

Comparison with non-Christian religions

Some 19th-century theologians thought that various pre-Christian religions and philosophies were pantheistic. They thought Pantheism was similar to the ancient Hindu[15]:pp. 618 philosophy of Advaita (non-dualism) to the extent that the 19th-century German Sanskritist Theodore Goldstücker remarked that Spinoza's thought was "... a western system of philosophy which occupies a foremost rank amongst the philosophies of all nations and ages, and which is so exact a representation of the ideas of the Vedanta, that we might have suspected its founder to have borrowed the fundamental principles of his system from the Hindus."[53]

19th-century European theologians also considered Ancient Egyptian religion to contain pantheistic elements and pointed to Egyptian philosophy as a source of Greek Pantheism.[15]:pp. 618–620 The latter included some of the Presocratics, such as Heraclitus and Anaximander.[54] The Stoics were pantheists, beginning with Zeno of Citium and culminating in the emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius. During the pre-Christian Roman Empire, Stoicism was one of the three dominant schools of philosophy, along with Epicureanism and Neoplatonism.[55][56] The early Taoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi is also sometimes considered pantheistic, although it could be more similar to Panentheism.[42]

Cheondoism, which arose in the Joseon Dynasty of Korea, and Won Buddhism are also considered pantheistic.

20th century

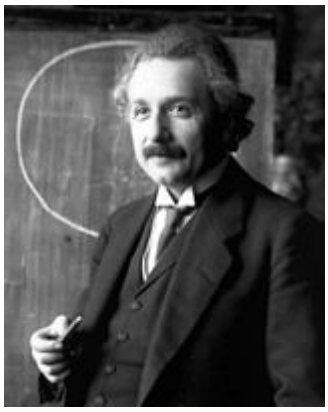
In a letter written to Eduard Büsching (25 October 1929), after Büsching sent Albert Einstein a copy of his book *Es gibt keinen Gott* ("There is no God"), Einstein wrote, "We followers of Spinoza see our God in the wonderful order and lawfulness of all that exists and in its soul [*Beseeltheit*] as it reveals itself in man and animal."[57] According to Einstein, the book only dealt with the concept of a personal god and not the impersonal God of pantheism.[57] In a letter written in 1954 to philosopher Eric Gutkind, Einstein wrote "the word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses."[58][59] In another letter written in 1954 he wrote "I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly."[58]

In the late 20th century, some declared that pantheism was an underlying theology of Neopaganism,[60] and pantheists began forming organizations devoted specifically to pantheism and treating it as a separate religion.[42]

Levi Ponce's *Luminaries of Pantheism* in Venice, California for The Paradise Project

21st century

In 2007, Dorion Sagan, the son of famous scientist and science communicator, Carl Sagan, published a book entitled *Dazzle Gradually: Reflections on the Nature of Nature* co-written with his mother, Lynn Margulis. In a chapter entitled, "Truth of My Father", he declares: "My father believed in the God of Spinoza and Einstein, God not behind nature, but as nature, equivalent to it."[61]



Albert Einstein is considered a pantheist by some commentators.

Pantheism is mentioned in a Papal encyclical in 2009[62] and a statement on New Year's Day in 2010,[63] criticizing pantheism for denying the superiority of humans over nature and seeing the source of man's salvation in nature.[62] In a review of the 2009 film *Avatar*, Ross Douthat, an author, described pantheism as "Hollywood's religion of choice for a generation now".[64]

In 2015, Los Angeles muralist Levi Ponce was commissioned to paint the 75-foot mural *Luminaries of Pantheism* on Ocean Front Walk in Venice, Los Angeles, California.[65] The organization that commissioned the work, The Paradise Project, is "dedicated to celebrating and spreading awareness about pantheism."[66] The mural depicts Albert Einstein, Alan Watts, Baruch Spinoza, Terence McKenna, Carl Jung, Carl Sagan, Emily Dickinson, Nikola Tesla, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ralph Waldo Emerson, W.E.B. Du Bois, Henry David Thoreau, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Rumi, Adi Shankara, and Laozi.[67]

Categorizations

There are multiple varieties of pantheism[15][68]:3 and various systems of classifying them relying upon one or more spectra or in discrete categories.

Degree of determinism

The philosopher Charles Hartshorne used the term Classical Pantheism to describe the deterministic philosophies of Baruch Spinoza, the Stoics, and other like-minded figures.[69] Pantheism (All-is-God) is often associated with monism (All-is-One) and some have suggested that it logically implies determinism (All-is-Now).[26][70][71][72][73] Albert Einstein explained theological determinism by stating,[74] "the past, present, and future are an 'illusion'". This form of pantheism has been referred to as "extreme monism", in which – in the words of one commentator – "God decides or determines everything, including our supposed decisions."[75] Other examples of determinism-inclined pantheisms include those of Ralph Waldo Emerson,[76] and Hegel.[77]

However, some have argued against treating every meaning of "unity" as an aspect of pantheism,[78] and there exist versions of pantheism that regard determinism as an inaccurate or incomplete view of nature. Examples include the beliefs of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and William James.[79]

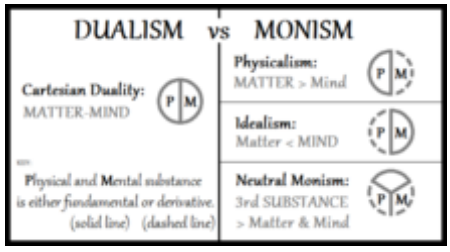
Degree of belief

It may also be possible to distinguish two types of pantheism, one being more religious and the other being more philosophical. The Columbia Encyclopedia writes of the distinction:

> "If the pantheist starts with the belief that the one great reality, eternal and infinite, is God, he sees everything finite and temporal as but some part of God. There is nothing separate or distinct from God, for God is the universe. If, on the other hand, the conception taken as the foundation of the system is that the great inclusive unity is the world itself, or the universe, God is swallowed up in that unity, which may be designated nature."[80]

Form of monism

Philosophers and theologians have often suggested that pantheism implies monism.[81] Different types of monism include:[82][83]



A diagram with neutral monism compared to Cartesian dualism, physicalism and idealism.

1. Substance monism, "the view that the apparent plurality of substances is due to different states or appearances of a single substance"[82]
2. Attributive monism, "the view that whatever the number of substances, they are of a single ultimate kind"[82]
3. Partial monism, "within a given realm of being (however many there may be) there is only one substance"[82]
4. Existence monism, the view that there is only one concrete object token (The One, "Τὸ Ἕν" or the Monad).[84]
5. Priority monism, "the whole is prior to its parts" or "the world has parts, but the parts are dependent fragments of an integrated whole"[83]
6. Property monism: the view that all properties are of a single type (e.g. only physical properties exist)
7. Genus monism: "the doctrine that there is a highest category; e.g., being"[83]

Views contrasting with monism are:

- Metaphysical dualism, which asserts that there are two ultimately irreconcilable substances or realities such as Good and Evil, for example, Manichaeism,[85]
- Metaphysical pluralism, which asserts three or more fundamental substances or realities.[85]
- Nihilism, negates any of the above categories (substances, properties, concrete objects, etc.).

Monism in modern philosophy of mind can be divided into three broad categories:

1. Idealism, phenomenalism, or mentalistic monism, which holds that only mind or spirit is real[85]
2. Neutral monism, which holds that one sort of thing fundamentally exists,[86] to which both the mental and the physical can be reduced[87]
3. Material monism (also called Physicalism and materialism), which holds that only the physical is real, and that the mental or spiritual can be reduced to the physical[85][86]

    a. Eliminative Materialism, according to which everything is physical and mental things do not exist[86]
    b. Reductive physicalism, according to which mental things do exist and are a kind of physical thing[86][note 1]

Certain positions do not fit easily into the above categories, such as functionalism, anomalous monism, and reflexive monism. Moreover, they do not define the meaning of "real".

Other

In 1896, J. H. Worman, a theologian, identified seven categories of pantheism: Mechanical or materialistic (God the mechanical unity of existence); Ontological (fundamental unity, Spinoza); Dynamic; Psychical (God is the soul of the world); Ethical (God is the universal moral order, Fichte; Logical (Hegel); and Pure (absorption of God into nature, which Worman equates with atheism).[15]

More recently, Paul D. Feinberg, professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, also identified seven: Hylozoistic; Immanentistic; Absolutistic monistic; Relativistic monistic; Acosmic; Identity of opposites; and Neoplatonic or emanationistic.[88]

Related concepts

Nature worship or nature mysticism is often conflated and confused with pantheism. It is pointed out by at least one expert in pantheist philosophy that Spinoza's identification of God with nature is very different from a recent idea of a self identifying pantheist with environmental ethical concerns, Harold Wood, founder of the Universal Pantheist Society. His use of the word nature to describe his worldview may be vastly different from the "nature" of modern sciences. He and other nature mystics who also identify as pantheists use "nature" to refer to the limited natural environment (as opposed to man-made built environment). This use of "nature" is different from the broader use from Spinoza and other pantheists describing natural laws and the overall phenomena of the physical world. Nature mysticism may be compatible with pantheism but it may also be compatible with theism and other views.[4]

Nontheism is an umbrella term which has been used to refer to a variety of religions not fitting traditional theism, and under which pantheism has been included.[4]

Panentheism (from Greek πᾶν (pân) "all"; ἐν (en) "in"; and θεός (theós) "God"; "all-in-God") was formally coined in Germany in the 19th century in an attempt to offer a philosophical synthesis between traditional theism and pantheism, stating that God is substantially omnipresent in the physical universe but also exists "apart from" or "beyond" it as its Creator and Sustainer.[89]:p.27 Thus panentheism separates itself from pantheism, positing the extra claim that God exists above and beyond the world as we know it.[90]:p.11 The line between pantheism and panentheism can be blurred depending on varying definitions of God, so there have been disagreements when assigning particular notable figures to pantheism or panentheism.[89]:pp. 71–72, 87–88, 105 [91]

Pandeism is another word derived from pantheism, and is characterized as a combination of reconcilable elements of pantheism and deism.[92] It assumes a Creator-deity that is at some point distinct from the universe and then transforms into it, resulting in a universe similar to the pantheistic one in present essence, but differing in origin.

Panpsychism is the philosophical view held by many pantheists that consciousness, mind, or soul is a universal feature of all things.[93] Some pantheists also subscribe to the distinct philosophical views hylozoism (or panvitalism), the view that everything is alive, and its close neighbor animism, the view that everything has a soul or spirit.[94]

Pantheism in religion

Traditional religions

Many traditional and folk religions including African traditional religions[95] and Native American religions[96][97] can be seen as pantheistic, or a mixture of pantheism and other doctrines such as polytheism and animism. According to pantheists, there are elements of pantheism in some forms of Christianity.[98][99][100]

Ideas resembling pantheism existed in East/South Asian religions before the 18th century (notably Sikhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Taoism). Although there is no evidence that these influenced Spinoza's work, there is such evidence regarding other contemporary philosophers, such as Leibniz, and later Voltaire.[101][102] In the case of Hinduism, pantheistic views exist alongside panentheistic, polytheistic, monotheistic, and atheistic ones.[103][104][105] In the case of Sikhism, stories attributed to Guru Nanak suggest that he believed God was everywhere in the physical world, and the Sikh tradition typically describes God as the

preservative force within the physical world, present in all material forms, each created as a manifestation of God. However, Sikhs view God as the transcendent creator,[106] "immanent in the phenomenal reality of the world in the same way in which an artist can be said to be present in his art".[107] This implies a more panentheistic position.

Spirituality and new religious movements

Pantheism is popular in modern spirituality and new religious movements, such as Neopaganism and Theosophy.[108] Two organizations that specify the word pantheism in their title formed in the last quarter of the 20th century. The Universal Pantheist Society, open to all varieties of pantheists and supportive of environmental causes, was founded in 1975.[109] The World Pantheist Movement is headed by Paul Harrison, an environmentalist, writer and a former vice president of the Universal Pantheist Society, from which he resigned in 1996. The World Pantheist Movement was incorporated in 1999 to focus exclusively on promoting naturalistic pantheism - a strict metaphysical naturalistic version of pantheism,[110] considered by some a form of religious naturalism.[111] It has been described as an example of "dark green religion" with a focus on environmental ethics.[112]

See also

- Animism
- Biocentrism (ethics)
- List of pantheists
- Theopanism, a term that is philosophically distinct but derived from the same root words

Notes

1. Such as Behaviourism,[87] Type-identity theory,[87] and Functionalism.[87]

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